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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001901

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PINS PGOV SOCI IIZ

SUBJECT: PRT MAYSAN: LOCAL OFFICIALS REQUEST EDUCATION AND AGRICULTURE ASSISTANCE

REF: BAGHDAD 1851

Classified By: PRT Team Leader Dan Foote for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C/REL MCFI) Summary: on June 17, representatives from Majar al-Kabir (MAK) city and al-Bhtera village, accompanied by Maysan governor's advisor Zaid Khalaf al-Hoshi, met with the PRT at Tallil Air Base. The MAK area education representative, inspector for education, agriculture representative, and the mayor of al-Bhtera village appealed for PRT assistance to their communities. MAK is a suspected hub of militia activities and the smuggling of Iranian produced arms and accelerants. The PRT plans to target MAK with reconstruction assistance once the city is cleared and stabilized by Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). The governor's advisor accompanied the group and asked that a health clinic construction project in MAK, stalled due to contractor security concerns, be restarted. The advisor assured the PRT Team Leader that provincial security forces would ensure contractor security. End Summary.

¶2. (C/REL MCFI) Salam Abdul Wahed Jafar, the mayor of MAK and a representative in MAK for the Director General of Education, described the poor state of school buildings and requested that the PRT renovate five primary schools and fund construction of a secondary school for girls and a kindergarten. Zaid asserted that the provincial government had built fifty schoolhouses over the last three years, but that mud and reed structures remain and the budget is not enough to cover all of the needed construction. Zaid continued, "Some schools conduct classes in three shifts. That alone says we need more schools." Salam also requested a computer lab and gymnasium. The Team Leader asked about sustainability and expressed concern over whether Maysan had staff capable of teaching computer classes. Zaid countered that there are currently four institutions training teachers of computer skills and classrooms are available - all they need are computers.

¶3. (C/REL MCFI) Jasim Mohammad Moshe, the agricultural representative from MAK, asked about a previous request for PRT assistance with building a greenhouse and bee-keeping facility. Jasim also asked for assistance in digging wells, citing the lack of suitable irrigation in the province and the current need to import vegetables from Iran. The PRT is actively looking at irrigation issues.

¶4. (C/REL MCFI) Ali Amtasher Abdulallah, the mayor of al-Bhtera village (located approximately twenty kilometers north of Amarah) described the challenges schoolchildren face getting to school in his community. There is no bridge nearby and children must cross the river in a boat to attend a school on the far side. Ali suggested the PRT buy trailers to serve as a school on the near side of the river and estimated the cost at less than USD 200,000. Asked about governmental support, Zaid said the provincial government was providing clean drinking water to the village and would provide a detailed project proposal for the trailers.

¶5. (C/REL MCFI) Zaid asked for PRT assistance with an

asphalt plant that had been requested by the Provincial Reconstruction and Development Committee (PRDC). The plant will employ 600 workers. The PRT is transferring the asphalt plant to a different funding source and the project is moving through the approval process. Zaid also asked that a health clinic project in MAK be restarted. The project had been forced into work stoppage over contractor security concerns and is 80 percent complete. The PRT Team Leader offered his support for completing the clinic and promised to ask GRS engineers to contact the contractor regarding work continuation. Zaid affirmed the provincial government's commitment to maintaining contractor security. The Team Leader reinforced the need for prioritizing projects and suggested that, while the PRT would consider all requests, decisions must be made based on priorities.

¶6. (C/REL MCFI) Zaid responded defensively to PRT inquiries on the morale and welfare of the people of Amarah. "Amarah is a small town," he said. "People always accuse Maysan of being the heart of terrorists in Iraq. But the last few days paint a different picture. Coalition forces entered Maysan without any violence. The terrorists come from outside Iraq, and when they are gone, Maysan will have even better security than before."

¶7. (C/REL MCFI) Comment: This was the first meeting between the PRT and leaders of several impoverished communities that have a reputation for harboring militia and stoking extremism. Majar al-Kabir has reportedly served as a haven for fighters fleeing the GOI crackdown in Basrah. Timely reconstruction efforts could prove critical to USG credibility in Maysan, and the PRT is working closely with

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its military counterparts on reconstruction plans for Majar al-Kabir, Amarah, and surrounding areas. End comment.
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